

Alameda Times-Star

Bay Area lawmakers top up campaign war chests

By Lisa Friedman WASHINGTON BUREAU

Monday, October 21, 2002 - WASHINGTON -- So much money, so little competition.

The fall federal campaign reports are in, and they show that Bay Area lawmakers are raising money hand-over-fist. No politician from the nine-county region has less than \$300,000 in his or her kitty, and some have as much as \$800,000.

What are they doing with all that cash? Not a lot of campaigning. Almost across the board, Bay Area members of Congress are sitting in safe seats, made all the more secure by last year's incumbent-protection redistricting process.

"Strategy No. 1 is to prepare for next time," said University of California, Berkeley, political science professor Bruce Cain. "The more of a war chest you have, the more you're going to scare away challengers."

Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, not surprisingly, is the leading money-maker in the Bay Area, with \$880,204 in her campaign coffers and another \$843,000 in her PAC to the Future political action committee.

Not far behind are Reps. Mike Honda, D-San Jose, Mike Thompson, D-Napa, and Ellen Tauscher, D-Alamo, all of whose coffers boast just over \$800,000.

Rep. Barbara Lee, whose fund raising has been energized ever since she voted alone against President Bush's use-of-force resolution last year, pulled in \$750,348. She, like Tauscher, has no Republican contender come November.

Trailing the list of local money raisers were Reps. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, with \$329,656 and Pete Stark, D-Fremont, with \$385,382.

Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Tracy, the only lawmaker in a competitive congressional race in the California Bay Area, has raised \$761,341. His challenger, Democrat Elaine Shaw, has raised \$506,639.

A new report has found that the U.S. Department of Energy takes longer than any other federal agency to process Freedom of Information Act requests.

The Department of Justice study found the median time DOE takes to answer requests is 2,009 days. Agencies are supposed to respond to information requests within 30 days.

That comes as no surprise to local activists.

"I think it's just really indicative of the type of secrecy that's surrounding the nuclear weapon development at the nuclear labs," said Tara Dorabji, outreach coordinator at the Tri-Valley Communities Against Radioactive Waste.

The report also found the number of Freedom of Information requests received by all federal departments and agencies reached a record high in 2001 of 2,246,212.

Of those, 177,969 are still pending.

Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, is teaming up with actress Julia Ormond to help promote positive images of America overseas.

Ormond ("Legends of the Fall," "Sabrina") is co-founder of FilmAid International, an organization founded by concerned celebrities to entertain and educate international refugees. The group debuted in Kosovo in 1999 and now is planning a mission to Afghanistan.

That is where Ormond and Lantos said they think they can work together.

Lantos this year co-sponsored legislation with Rep. Henry Hyde, R-III., which allocates \$135 million to expand radio and TV programming from the United States to Muslim countries, and \$225 million over two years to finance academic exchange programs, English-language teaching and twin-city partnerships with predominantly Muslim countries. The bill passed the House by unanimous consent.

Lantos of FilmAid said, "This extremely creative approach fits in with U.S. goals to advance public diplomacy and to demonstrate there is an alternative to radicalism and despair."

He urged that Congress work with the nonprofit to counter the anti-American messages depicted in Muslim countries. First, however, the legislation has to pass the Senate, where it is still pending.

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